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TAGS: AF EAID MARR PREL SNAR UK

SUBJECT: (C) AFGHANISTAN: DAS GASTRIGHT'S MEETING WITH FCO
NOVEMBER 14

Classified By: PolCouns Richard Mills; reason 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: SCA DAS John Gastright discussed Afghanistan November 14 with FCO, MOD and Cabinet Office officials. On the upcoming NATO summit in Riga, the UK argued that pressing for use of the term "counter-insurgency" in the summit communiqu would invite unhelpful perceptions of a split in the alliance, even though counter-insurgency is the reality on the ground and the UK says so publicly. PM Blair will be tough in private at Riga, but careful to maintain the appearance of NATO unity in public.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY CON'T: DAS Gastright shared a draft "wedding registry" of specific tasks the USG would like both countries to use in pressing others to do more. He welcomed the EU's intent to do more with the Afghan National Police (ANP) and indicated the USG would increase its aid in order to build an ANP that can win, even if it exceeds the GOA's ability to support from its own budget. Sensing that Karzai is "drifting," the British made the case for a senior civilian international figure to support him; Gastright noted the downside and argued that the process of identifying a new UN envoy would have a negative impact. The UK urged creation of a small, informal contact group in capitals to brainstorm, beginning with a teleconference. The British side said that PM Blair planned to visit Islamabad November 19 and Kabul November 20.

¶3. (C) SUMMARY CON'T: On counter-narcotics (CN), the two sides agreed to accelerate their discussions. The UK reported President Karzai had said that day he would accept ground-based spraying (GBS) provided it is implemented throughout the country and he can say the international community forced him into it. Gastright promised to share the GBS environmental assessment with the UK as soon as it is ready. END SUMMARY.

¶4. (U) PARTICIPANTS: DAS Gastright was accompanied by Poloff (notetaker). The UK side was led by FCO Director for South Asia and Afghanistan Adam Thomson, accompanied by Jaspal Panesar and MOD's David Jolley (Directorate of Joint Commitments), and joined over lunch by Margaret Aldred of the Cabinet Office (deputy to Sir Nigel Sheinwald, the Prime Minister's Foreign Policy Adviser). FCO Afghanistan Group Head Richard Codrington, Afghanistan Counter-Narcotics Head Peter Holland, and NATO Team Head Danae Meacockbashir participated in the first part of the discussion.

15. (C) RIGA: The British took the DAS's point that how the Afghanistan mission is defined has policy implications: the goal of peacekeeping is to keep things quiet, whereas the goal of counter-insurgency is to gain a loyal population. Nonetheless, the British argued forcefully against pressing for language in the Riga NATO summit communiqu to describe Afghanistan operations as "counter-insurgency" vice "peacekeeping," as that would invite unhelpful perceptions of a split in the alliance. They agreed that counter-insurgency is the reality on the ground, and noted that British officials say so publicly. For the same reason (maintaining a facade of NATO unity), they argued against pressing for the term "civil-military cooperation," noting that France seems amenable to the term "comprehensive approach," which Codrington said "gives us ninety percent of what we want." The UK is lobbying partners, especially Germany, France and Spain, to contribute more in their national non-military capacity. Thomson gave notice that Prime Minister Blair will be tough in private at Riga but careful to maintain the appearance of NATO unity in public. Gastright said that the USG will remain adamant on the need to eliminate national caveats, fulfill the Combined Joint Statement of Requirements, embrace civil-military cooperation, and get partners do more.

16. (C) INCREASING ASSISTANCE: DAS Gastright shared an informal draft "wedding registry" of specific tasks that specific countries should take on. He hoped something like it could serve as a basis for coordinated U.S.-UK pressure on other countries to do more. The British welcomed the idea but worried that countries could misuse the "adopt a province" concept as a rationale for not expanding beyond their current area of operations.

17. (C) POLICE: Both sides agreed on the importance of increasing assistance to the Afghan National Police (ANP). DAS Gastright made clear that the goal has changed from creating a sustainable force to creating a force that can win, even if that exceeds the GOA's capacity to sustain it from its own budget. He said he was hopeful the USG would soon announce a major increase in support, and welcomed the EU's intent to do more with the ANP, noting the particular need for mentors.

18. (C) COUNTER-NARCOTICS: The British reported that President Karzai had said that day he was willing to approve ground-based spraying (GBS) provided (i) that it was the agreed international position, (ii) the program was implemented throughout the country, and (iii) he could say the international community forced it on him. As there is no capacity to conduct full GBS in all provinces this coming season, it was not clear whether Karzai was trying to set an impossible condition or merely saying that the GBS should be seen to be applied fairly; Kabul embassies would be asked to seek clarification. The DAS recommended focusing on Helmand and Badakshan provinces for GBS, pointing out that the two-to three-month gap between the starts of the growing season in those two provinces would give the GBS campaign more time. Gastright promised to share the environmental assessment as soon as it is ready. Recognizing that decisions need to be taken very soon, the two sides agreed to accelerate their discussion on Afghanistan CN. They also agreed that buying the opium crop is a bad idea and a non-starter. (Note: Embassy Kabul later reported that President Karzai's comments on GBS were intended to signal a positive willingness to carry out eradication operations in Helmand province, as well as another province. End Note.)

19. (C) KARZAI: The British sensed "drift" on the part of Karzai, and made the case for the international community to name a "substantial international civilian figure, not a High Representative or Proconsul" to support him. The DAS noted the downside and argued that this process diverted attention from pressing business.

110. (C) MUSA QALA: Thomson saw the Musa Qala experiment as "attractive," even if "not necessarily replicable" and a

propaganda coup for the Taliban: "killing Afghan farmer boys, as the UK and Canada have done, antagonizes the population." He agreed the experiment must be judged by its effectiveness, which Gastright said would be tested soon. Thomson said Karzai was prepared to talk to Nawzad elders about a similar arrangement with a stronger assertion of GOA authority.

¶11. (C) PAKISTAN: Thomson praised the USG's "excellent efforts" to bring Karzai and Pakistan's President Musharraf together. He called Quetta the Taliban's "hinge" of coordination between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Gastright stressed the need to continue to work closely with the GOP, including pressing it to do more to facilitate trade with Afghanistan. Thomson confided that Prime Minister Blair plans to visit Islamabad November 19 and Kabul November 20.

¶12. (C) CONTACT GROUP IN CAPITALS: The UK argued for creation of a small, informal contact group in capitals - not to handle day-to-day issues which must remain in Kabul, but to take a longer view and brainstorm. Gastright agreed to give it a try through an initial teleconference at the level of A/S or DAS dealing directly with Afghanistan, but resisted involving officials who would need to be briefed in preparation for the discussions.

¶13. (U) DAS Gastright has cleared this message.

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